

A

FAST SERMON.

BY

THE REV. CANON KERRICH.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

EAST SERRON

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Price ONE SHILLING

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S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF SARUM,

On WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1781.

B E I N G

THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A GENERAL FAST.

By WALTER KERRICH, A. M.CANON RESIDENTIARY OF SARUM, AND LATE FELLOW
OF CATHARINE-HALL, CAMBRIDGE.

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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

ON WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 22ND

1860

THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A GENERAL

FAST BY THE PRESBYTERY OF

THE SOUTHERN METHODIST CHURCH

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

AND

BY THE REV. J. H. W. H. H. H.

JOEL, Chap. ii. Verses 12, 13.

Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rent your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

AS the duty of fasting and humiliation made a part of the Mosaical œconomy, and seems founded on the dictates of reason and nature, so is it likewise highly agreeable to the Christian religion, and to the end and design of the Gospel dispensation. The examples of fasting enjoined by publick authority occur very frequently in the Old Testament. The great day of expiation was a day of afflicting the soul; and the exhortation of the Prophet JOEL, which our Church has adopted for services of this nature, represents it as a part of the repentance of a disobedient, and rebellious people.

The conduct of the *Ninevites*, upon the apprehension of God's approaching judgments, seems to place it amongst the branches of natural religion; as the means of reconciliation, which unassisted reason would suggest unto mankind. And though our Saviour has left no positive precept with regard to this duty, yet, as he has join'd it with those of Charity and Prayer, we must readily suppose it to be of equal obligation and necessity.

Accordingly we find it received by the Apostles, and practiced in the primitive Church with the greatest exactness and severity. It is earnestly recommended by ST. JAMES;—*Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning; and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*

If this account of the rise and origin of publick humiliation, (short, and imperfect as it is) should serve to give a sanction to our present solemnity, it becomes the immediate object of my duty and wishes, to endeavour to enforce the necessity of it.

We are here met together for the solemn humiliation of ourselves, with fasting and prayer, before Almighty God, to supplicate his divine majesty for the pardon of our
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sins, and the sins of the nation; to implore his blessing and assistance on our arms; and to beg the intervention of his Providence to give a happy issue to the war we are now engaged in; by restoring and perpetuating peace, safety, and prosperity, to his Majesty, and his kingdoms.

And surely, if ever there was a time when we should turn unto the Lord our God, it is this: when so many entertain the most melancholy apprehensions with respect to the future security and happiness of these kingdoms.

As to the justifying causes and motives of the unhappy war in which we are engaged with our Colonies; these I shall not pretend to investigate: such a discussion is neither suitable to my abilities, nor the place from whence I address you. As the minister of the Gospel of peace, and for the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I would wish to do good to every member of it: and I think I may justify my silence on points, where a great variety of sentiments prevail, by respectable authorities.

CHRIST, (says one Author*) founded a Religion totally unconcerned with all human policy, and human government; and although some men, perhaps through

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* Soame Jenyns on the Internal Evidence, &c.

inattention (for I wish to be candid) to the particular circumstances of time and place, and to the persons to whom they are address'd, have produced texts of Scripture in support of doctrines inconsistent with the natural rights of mankind, and contradictory to the genius and spirit of our happy constitution; it is nevertheless certain, that our Saviour himself never purposely enters upon the subject of government; that being no necessary part of his doctrine; but treats of it only as he was led by particular occasions. * “ His Apostles observed the same conduct: “ so that the Scriptures stand clear of all disputes about “ the rights of Princes and Subjects; they must be left to “ be decided by principles of natural equity, and the con- “ stitutions of the country.”

This persuasion, therefore, rather leads me to look for the cause of our national calamities in our national offences; and to enforce the necessity of your devout observance of this day, and your future amendment, as the consequence and fruit of humiliation, from the conviction that the judgments of the Lord are upon this land, that the inhabitants thereof may learn righteousness. No one surely will pretend to say, that the Judge of all the earth does not do right, in making the depravity of a nation, or their general viola-
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* Bp. Sherlock on Romans xiii, 1. *Discourse* xiii, vol. 4.

tion of his laws, as they are expressed in the book of nature, and more fully displayed in the Gospel, an instrument of their punishment.

That the happiness, or misery, of a people, considered collectively as such, as well as that of any particular man, depends on their keeping, or violating, God's commandments, is a proposition that will scarcely be controverted. There is indeed a difference: for if we estimate happiness by the standard which the world has established, the possession of outward blessings, and a freedom from temporal evils and inconveniences, the proposition indeed is not so universally true, with respect to particular persons, as it is with reference to kingdoms and states. Every man of virtue is not always the child of prosperity: for many virtuous men drink of the bitter cup of affliction. The hands of many of them hang down; and the knees of many are weak. On the contrary, we frequently see the wicked man possessing all those blessings, which serve to the comfort or embellishment of life. This will not authorise us to arraign the Justice of God: for, as every individual is born to live for ever, the distribution of reward, and punishment, to the virtue, or demerit, of every individual, may be deferred, without any imputation on the supreme governor of the world. On the great day of retribution, every seeming irregularity will be adjusted; the veil, which conceals from us the ways
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of providence, will be removed; and our admission to a near and unclouded view of them will shew us, that the Judge of all the earth has done right from the beginning of time; and on that day every individual will receive according to what he has done, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. But, with respect to publick societies, or nations, the case is different: for they are not made to be immortal, nor, as such, will they be called to a future account. This life is the scene of their reward, and punishment. General virtue produces temporal prosperity; and national depravity exposes the society to God's severe judgments, if it does not bring a total destruction on it; and the Almighty's dispensations, with respect to nations, seem to proceed on one uniform and immutable foundation, the expression and vindication of his justice and goodness in this world.

If this description of the œconomy of providence does not carry with it sufficient conviction, to make you turn unto the Lord your God with all your heart, we will have recourse to his own word to bear testimony to the truth of it. There is no judgment threatened to any nation in Scripture, but on account of the sin and wickedness it was guilty of; and the denunciation is uniformly attended with the promise of mercy, on repentance. God solemnly denounced destruction to the city of *Nineveh* by his Prophet;
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and that within forty days. Upon the inhabitants of that city returning to God, the sentence was revers'd ;—*He repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them, and did it not.* The destruction of the *Canaanites*, as a people, was deferred, as long as their sins admitted a place for their repentance : but when the measure of their iniquities was full, the Almighty sent the *Israelites* to root them out, and to take possession of their land.

But let us consider the history of the *Jews*, which constitutes so great a part of the Old Testament.—Select any period ; and the situation of their temporal affairs may be determined by the state of their moral character. Prosperity, and adversity, invariably attended their righteousness, or disobedience,—the fear of the Lord, or the breach of his commandments.

The people of *Israel* were indeed the chosen people of God, and distinguished from the rest of the world by the special directions of his providence. This was not owing to any fixed partiality in the Almighty to them, as a nation : for it is the opinion of able writers, that the choice of them was for the sake of true Religion ; to preserve the one God among them, to propagate it among the nations, and to prepare the way for introducing into the world, under proper circum-

circumstances, that seed, in which all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. The dispensations therefore of God to the *Jews*, as they relate to temporal blessings, and temporal punishments, may be applied to other nations: and the administration of his Providence, as evidenced to them in the exercise of favour and correction, is a pattern of his dealings with all the rest of the world.

If now this view of the general government of the world by God is a just one, a survey of the present moral and religious state of this nation must fill us with fearful apprehensions. A detail of national vices is a detail of national miseries;—and I will not allow myself the liberty of running out into a declamation against the wickedness of the times. The prayers appointed for this day acknowledge, that our prophaneness and infidelity, our heresies and schisms, our inordinate love of pleasure, and other manifold offences, do justly deserve the severity of God's wrath. Vice has lost one of her characteristical qualities. She no longer seeks for retirement and obscurity, but defies observation and censure;—a dreadful addition to, and enlargement of, her power. But there is one prevailing sin, which leads to a general corruption and depravity,—the violation of the sabbath; and which must be matter of grief to every serious and well-disposed mind. It is become a day of diversion to
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the great; a day of idleness and debauchery to the lower part of the nation. If the voice of correction is address'd to this latter order of men, upon their non-attendance on the services of the church on the sabbath, or their licentious violation of it, they are apt immediately to say,—do not our betters the same? This question, as it is grounded on an erroneous presumption of its operating as an exemption from censure, is easily obviated; but is nevertheless a mortifying one; as every serious man must feel an uneasiness and discomposure, from reflecting that those, who are distinguished by their birth, rank, or any other preeminence, should betray so visible a neglect, and even contempt for one of the most important of religious duties, as to make it the object even of the clown's observation.

They, who put the question, mean it by way of defence and justification: and to this sense, with reference to them only, it must be confined: but will it not, in another view, take the severe form of satire? Example certainly is of powerful agency in human affairs: he, who follows a good one, really consults his own happiness: but if we consider him merely in the character of an imitator, I doubt whether he will be entitled to any other commendations, but what may arise from the wisdom of the choice, and the closeness of resemblance. He, that follows an ill example, exposes himself

to the just imputation of folly; whilst the badness of the Archetype will never be admitted to excuse, or even extenuate the guilt contracted by the imitation.

But a brief consideration of the nature of the Sabbath may be here necessary; as it may serve to convince you, that the violation of it is not only an offence against God and religion, but is highly prejudicial to society in general. As the Sabbath was originally designed for the religious commemoration of God's works of creation, for acknowledging, and worshipping, one true God and Author of all things; and praising him perpetually for his wisdom and goodness; the neglect and violation of it is certainly a dishonour to his majesty; a breach of a duty, which is of eternal and unchangeable obligation. This view of it, independent of its being the commemoration of our Saviour's Resurrection from the dead, is sufficient to imprint a reverence for it on our minds: but the tendency which it has to promote the good of the community in general, should likewise endear it to our observance.

On the Lord's day, his word is administered unto us, not solely for our comfort, but our improvement: a sense of the obligation and importance of relative duties is awakened within us; and the practice of them is enforced. It is true indeed,

indeed, that an accurate knowledge of the nature and extent of those duties, which include in them whatsoever things are true, are honest, are just, are pure, are lovely, and of good report, is best acquired by still contemplation, and studious inquiry: but then it is equally true, that our necessary intercourse with the world, the avocations of pleasure, and the allurements of temporary interest, have all a tendency to weaken, and efface in our minds the impression and character of moral virtues. The Sabbath serves to revive them in us; and to fix in our memory a permanent idea of their beauty, their usefulness, their necessity.

But how shall we provide for the spiritual welfare of the ignorant, and laborious part of society; of those whose whole time is employed in procuring their daily subsistence? If the Lord's day is necessary to them, as the day of humanity, in affording them rest from their labour, it is equally, if not more necessary to them, as the day of instruction in morality; as a day of edification in Christian righteousness. The interests of human society require us to set a value on an institution, which, by its regular returns, serves happily to preserve and perpetuate a sense of religion in the inferior members of it. For when this sense (the vigilant centinel of the heart) is once removed, a corruption of principles, and a viciousness of conduct, must immediately ensue. To the decay of

this sense of religion we may fairly impute the visible increase of theft and robbery amongst us; and that violence, which has arisen to such an enormous height, as to become formidable, even to those whose situation in life might seem to secure them from its attacks.

For the cure of these alarming evils to society, we cannot surely be willing to depend solely on the exercise of legal correction. EPICURUS, after he had excluded divine Providence from the world, was necessitated perhaps to think, that the only argument left, which could restrain men from injuring others, was the fear of punishment. The Roman Philosopher gives a more valuable opinion; and which is worthy even of the Christian's attention: Take away, * says he, piety, and you destroy, at the same time, fidelity, human society, and the most excellent virtue, Justice. It is, I am afraid, strictly true, that the provisions of the law, though entitled to our highest reverence, as the valuable productions of human wisdom, and as being founded on an affectionate regard for the interests of society, do not, from the corruption of mankind, completely answer the good purposes for which they were intended. Other reflections also occur. Wise men have doubted how far human Laws ought to inflict capital punishments for † positive offences.

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* *Cicero de Naturâ Deorum.*

† Offences against the municipal law only, and not against the law of nature.

Some have thought, that the severity of the Laws hinders their execution: whilst others have ventured to deliver it as their opinion, that a frequent extension of mercy operates to a multiplication of crimes. An examination of these opinions far exceeds the compass of my abilities.

One observation I will venture to offer to your attention. —It is this:—If the right of the legislature, in any country, to enforce its own laws, by the death of the transgressor, does not stand clear of all doubt and controversy; if the severity of punishment is not a sufficient remedy for those disorders which affect the security and happiness of a kingdom; or if the exercise of mercy, that brightest ornament, and richest jewel of power, proves an encouragement to vice; the obvious consequence surely is, that, for the more effectual prevention of offences, destructive of the peace of society, and dishonourable in the eyes of foreigners, to our civil polity, it is become highly necessary to endeavour to add the fear of God to the fear of the Magistrate.

Another vice, big with danger to the community, is luxury;—though I am sensible that it has been defended on the principle of its usefulness, in a free dispersion of property; by the encouragement it gives to ingenuity, the source of private delight and national honour; and by the supply it
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affords to the necessities of the laborious part of mankind. In a commercial state, this defence meets us with the strongest force and vigour. If the spirit of luxury was confined solely to those, whose rank and fortune allow them to yield to its suggestions, I would not dare to arraign it; and when, after the claims on their humanity are answered by the exertions of a benevolent and well-directed charity (and surely the exercise of this great Christian virtue, as it concerns the administering relief to our poor brethren, they are eminently distinguished for) when, I say, these demands are answered,—their indulgence of it, within the bounds of moderation and soberness, is so far from being the object of censure, that it is of the highest benefit to society.

But when luxury spreads itself, like the influence of a raging pestilence, amongst all ranks and degrees; when by the folly of imitation, that powerful agent in human affairs, it destroys domestick happiness, through the neglect, or total exclusion of œconomy, so necessary to it; when, by its continual demands for the supply of a consuming vanity, it leads to the breach of relative duties; when it betrays men into crimes, the commission of which, before their seduction by the allurements of pleasures which they have no right to enjoy, they would have shuddered at; and at the last exposes them to the shame and correction of publick justice;—

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it then, in my opinion, assumes not only the form, but even the substance, of a most destructive evil.

But, be this so, or not,—my present concernment is, not so much to trace luxury in every place, which one might reasonably expect not to find the scene of its operations, as to view its effects on society in general; on mankind in their aggregate capacity, as a nation.

Look into history.—Luxury was one of the causes of the rapid declension of the *Perſian* greatness. It contributed to the destruction of the *Grecian* states;—those states, which effectually opposed the attacks of wanton ambition, and despotick pride; and whose history, if viewed solely with respect to the extent of their power, and their internal happiness, is still the object of admiration, and delight. Luxury undermined the boasted liberties of the *Romans*, and was a powerful instrument in putting a final period to that dominion, which they thought was decreed by Heaven itself, to be as firm, as it was extensive.

Shall we endeavour briefly to shew how this destructive vice operates;—this fatal poison,—which the concurrent testimony of historians, philosophers, and politicians, assures us scarcely ever fails to consume whole kingdoms and states;
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—this grand destroyer, which levels with the dust, and annihilates the most substantial buildings, which a long course of ages, and the noblest exertions of human fortitude, and human policy, have contributed to raise?

Luxury enervates the strength of the body, and the vigor of the mind; it makes men's happiness depend on a thousand imaginary conveniencies and superfluities; it creates in them an unreasonable fondness for life, by a variety of ties and engagements, which endear it to them; disqualifying them from facing the approaches of danger, and death, with boldness and fortitude. It stifles the great motives of zeal for their Prince, and love for their country. Luxury weakens, and by degrees extinguishes the spirit of independence, which, when it is not attended with an intemperate pride, or an impatience of the restraints of necessary subordination, is an ornament to him who is actuated by it; whilst it forms one of the strongest barriers against every illegal encroachment,—one of the greatest securities of a free state.

There is another vice, which peculiarly marks the complexion of the times; and which, as it is highly injurious to individuals, and offensive to society, requires some notice and reprehension;—I mean, the vice of calumny. Is any
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rank or elevation in life secured from the insinuations of its malevolence, or the effrontery of its abuse? The rough, and invidious representations, which it daily offers to public view, disgust men of common taste and judgment; and must in time be esteemed merely the exhibitions of a corrupt heart, without the least resemblance or affinity to truth. One consequence will ensue, prejudicial to the interests of virtue: for men of wicked and depraved inclinations will set all censure at defiance, from a conviction that no one will seriously attend to its expressions; and a general incredulity, with respect to a fair delineation of character, will thus become an encouragement and support to vice.

It would give me pain to be suspected of having the least attachment to that argument, which has been used for restraining the just freedom of the press,—that it is necessary to prevent the daily abuse of it. A jealousy of every exertion of power, which carries with it the least appearance of circumscribing constitutional rights, becomes an Englishman. He that feels it in the strongest degree, may find ample satisfaction from the account given by an able and learned writer * of the true nature of the freedom of the press; and will, I think, concur with his judgment, when he says, that to censure its licentiousness, is to maintain its liberties.

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* BLACKSTONE.

But I will detain you no longer.—If the admonition contained in the text should be addressed to one single person, as a sinner, it would certainly be worthy of his notice; for it speaks the same language with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If we view it as God's express declaration to a sinful people, it forces a general attention: for the Almighty himself saith by his Prophet, that “He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.” We have here a strong and undeniable assurance, that a correction of our national vices, a revival of a sense of God and Religion, and an amendment both in principle and practice, will secure to us, as a people, the Almighty's favour, and every gracious dispensation of his Providence; will obtain pardon for our sins; will avert those heavy judgments, which we confess our manifold provocations have justly deserved; will bring God's blessing on the arms of his Majesty, and restore and perpetuate peace, safety, and prosperity, to himself, and his kingdoms.—O that there were such an heart in the people of this land, that they would fear God, and keep all his commandments always; that it might be well with them, and their children after them.

May these kingdoms and their colonies be moulded and combined into one entire solid body, which, by its strength and happiness, may be the object of fear and envy to its enemies.

mies. May we all be united under that form of government which the Roman historian * describes as the firmest;—a government, where the subject rejoices in obedience.

God grant, that the apprehensions of our danger, and, above all, the sense of our offences against God, whom we have forsaken by an open and undisguised licentiousness, by an unguarded compliance with the weakness and infirmities of our nature, or in any other mode of rebellion and revolt, may incline us to turn unto him again with all our hearts. In his sight, the nations of the earth are as a drop in the bucket, and are counted as the small dust in the balance.

If the impressions of religious contrition last no longer than the day, I need not inform you, that it is not the fast described by *Isaiah* as acceptable unto the Lord: and our observance of it will be only an expression of a willingness to comply with the injunctions of civil authority, without any reasonable expectation of pardon and reconciliation with God, or the attainment of those blessings it is intended to secure to us. The day of national humiliation should be the æra of national amendment; and, if every one would

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* Oratio Furii Camilli Consulis ad patres de Latinis referentis — “ Certe
“ id firmissimum longe imperium est, quo obedientes gaudent.

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endeavour to reform himself, this great, this difficult work might be compleated. At least, if every individual would frame his behaviour agreeably to the situation and character assigned him by Providence, this world would not be the scene of so much disorder, contention, and violence, as it is. Every individual would by such a conduct make his own pilgrimage through life more chearful to himself, more comfortable to his fellow-travellers; and, what is of still greater importance, would qualify himself for the attainment and enjoyment of pure and eternal happiness, which our Saviour Jesus Christ has promised to his faithful servants in the new Jerusalem,—the city of the living God; where all shall be peace, order, and harmony;—for there will be established the kingdom of Heaven.

F I N I S.



